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AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

The origin of and need for correspondence education are discussed. Campuses offering correspondence courses need to evaluate both demand for classes and students' personal/educational interests. In developing a curriculum area, attention might be directed to student educational objectives, appropriate learning activities, organizing the curriculum, and evaluating the learner. The faculty member should determine what objectives should be emphasized in the correspondence course: student interests in subject matter, their need for vocational skills and knowledge, or their recreational and artistic interests. A second source for establishing objectives is to study society and implement selected trends in the curriculum, while a third source of educational goals emphasizes what subject matter specialists believe is worthwhile to learn. Correspondence work completed by students should be comprehensively evaluated. For each correspondence lesson completed, the faculty members should consider depth of learning and comprehensive coverage of the subject matter, along with the mechanics of students' writing. Finally, each student should be provided continuous feedback. (SW)

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CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION

Northeast Missouri State University brochure entitled Correspondence Study Bulletin states the following purpose for correspondence study:

> Correspondence courses are especially offered to accomodate students who are unable to attend classes on the campus or cannot find a particular course offered on the campus at that particular time to meet their need. Those persons out of school due to physical disability, fulltime employment, or simply for those who need some extra credit for certification or for salary advance will find this type of study beneficial.

Correspondence education then has definite purposes to fulfill in society. Educational needs of individuals and groups need to be met. Society benefits from having well educated individuals who utilize their understandings, skills, and abilities in working for an improved area, city, state, and nation. Problems exist in society. These problems need identification. Data and information must be gathered in the solving of problems. Ultimately, a hypothesis (answer) to the selected problem is chosen. The solution is tested and revised, if necessary. Appropriately educated persons should be better able to solve problems in society, as compared to those less well educated.

In addition to guiding participants to acquire worthwhile knowledge and skills for problem solving situations, correspondence education should guide learners to enrich their own personal lives. Diverse courses may be offered which assist in developing that which is good, true, and beautiful.

Origin Of Correspondence Education

Needs of individuals in education must be met. Otherwise, productive individuals in society might not be developed. MacKenzie, Christensen, and Rigby[1] wrote the following pertaining to instructional needs in the United States by the year

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[1] Ossian MacKenzie, et. al. Correspondence Instruction in the United States, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968, pp. 13, 14.

1870:

> The expansion westward, the Industrial Revolution, and the increasing role of the woman in American society were exerting considerable pressure on the American educational system in 1870. New needs for both general and techinical training added to the strain that a rapidly increasing population was placing on conventional suppliers of instruction.
>
> Correspondence instruction was one of the resourceful responses which arose to meet this need. Three different kinds of demands on the country's instructional resources were important stimuli to the rise of correspondence instruction: (1) educational, (2) training, and (3) general.

Educational goals included the development of literate persons, as well as development of persons who can identify problems in society and attempt to solve problematic situations. Training goals involve the development of skills to assist individuals to be productive in the world of work. Job and occupation education is significant pertaining to the concept Training. The third category of correspondence education General, includes course work pertaining to developing recreational skills within persons or to satisfy curiosities of individuals. The recreational skills to be developed or the curiosities to be satisfied may be taken to satisfy personal needs and not be related to educational and training goals.[2]

The first International Conference on Correspondence Education was held in 1938. Knute O. Broady[3], a speaker at the Conference, stated the major objective of education in a democracy: "By equality of educational opportunity we mean extending education to every one, no matter how humble his birth, no matter where he may live, and no matter what his reasonable aspirations may be."

In Europe in 1850, a pattern was developed for conducting correspondence education. Educational opportunities were extended to individuals beyond the confines of universities. In 1850 William Sewell of Exeter College in England stated, "Though it may be impossible to bring the masses requiring education to the university, may it not be possible to carry the university to them?"[4]

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[2]Ibid., p. 14 and 15.

[3]Ibid., p. 16.

[4]Ibid., p. 24.

From England, Anna Eliot Tickenor received ideas in developing the first correspondence courses in the United States. Her correspondence courses began in 1873 and ended in 1897 upon the death of the founder. Tickenor perceived her role as being humanitarian. MacKenzie, Christensen, and Rigby[5] state the following:

> The idea of an interchange of letters between student and teacher appears to have originated with Anna Tickenor. Monthly correspondence with guided readings and frequent tests formed an essential part in the society's personalized instruction. Six different departments--history, science, art, literature, French and German--offered a total of twenty-four subjects. Although enrollment declined seriously in the society's final years of operation, this slackening off is apparently attributable more to the founder's insistance upon "working quietly" and avoiding all promotion or advertising then to dissatisfaction with the quality of instruction.

Peterson and associates[6] quote the following citing reference sources pertaining to correspondence education:

> Correspondence study has been a familiar feature on the American educational landscape for over seventy years. It is the learning method of choice for all those solitary learners--solitary by preference or by circumstance (for example, military assignment). Currently there are said to be about five million correspondence students in the United States. A 1970 survey found 24 percent enrolled at private schools, 57 percent at federal and military schools, 7 percent at colleges and universities (usually their extension divisions), and 10 percent at religious schools.

Determining Need for Correspondence Courses

Colleges and universities offering courses in correspondence must assess need in the total curriculum. Which courses then should be offered? There are no precise answers to this question. A campus offering cources in correspondence will need to evaluate demand of participants for titles of class. How many enrollees are there in each course? Does the enrollment reflect stability, an increase, or a decrease in each offing? Do participants express a desire for new offerings in correspondence work to meet personal needs and interests?

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[5] Ibid., p. 25.

[6] Richard Peterson and Associates. Lifelong Learning in America. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980, pp. 54-55.

James Popham[7] from the University of California puts forth a model to assess needs of individuals in education. Among other means to determine needs, Popham recommends a questionnaire approach. A random sampling of prospective participants may respond to the questionnaire. In future correspondence work, participants might then indicate with a checkmark or write an ordered numeral which correspondence courses should receive priority. Respondents may also rate with ordered numerals which objectives should receive priority in a correspondence course. The possible titles and objectives for correspondence course work must be developed and listed by the correspondence faculty in a college or university. Respondents to the questionnaire should have ample opportunities to list additional course titles, as well as objectives for correspondence courses.

Correspondence faculty may also visit, if possible, with participants enrolled in correspondence work to discuss new course titles, as well as relevant objectives within each offering. Past enrollees and prospective participants also need to be interviewed to assess need in offering correspondence courses.

In developing any curriculum area, Ralph Tyler[8] raises four questions. These are:

1. Which objectives should learners achieve?
2. Which learning activities need to be provided to achieve the objectives?
3. How should the curriculum be organized?
4. Which evaluation procedures should be utilized to determine learner progress?

Correspondence faculty members need to choose relevant objectives carefully for learners to attain. One source of three from which to select objectives is to ascertain learner's interests and needs. The interests came from learners

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[7]Popham, W. James. "Deciding on Defensible Goals Via Needs Assessment." filmstrip and tape combination. Los Angeles: Vimcet Associates, 1971.

[8]Ralph Tyler. Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction. University of Chicago Press, 1950.

and cannot be forced upon them. Correspondence courses ought to be flexible enough for students to indicate personal interests and choice in terms of content to be studied. Correspondence faculty members determine needs of enrolled students. Thus, each faculty member within a correspondence course decides that which is valuable for enrollees to learn. The involved faculty member specializes in subject matter, vocational skills and knowledge, or recreational and artistic endeavors emphasized in a particular course. Thus, it behooves the faculty member to give careful consideration in determining what (the objectives) should be emphasized in teaching/learning situations. The needs of the learner are then determined by correspondence faculty members.

A second source of objectives, according to Ralph Tyler[9], is to study society and implement selected societal trends in the curriculum. Which skills, understandings, and attitudes should a learner achieve to become a proficient member of society? Faculty members need to study society and its trends comprehensively. Each correspondence course must reflect those goals which guide enrollees to become proficient members in society.

A third source of educational goals[10] emphasizes what subject matter specialists believe is worthwhile to learn. Input from the following academicians, as examples, is relevant depending upon the title, including scope and sequence, of the correspondence course:

1. Social scientists. Historians, geographers, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and economists have excellent recommendations to make pertaining to needed academic learnings for enrollees in educational programs.

2. Scientists. Astronomers, biologists, chemists, zoologists, botanists, geologists, physicists, and geneticists need to have their academic area of specialty emphasized in specific correspondence courses.

3. Other subject matter specialists who provide valuable input into a correspondence course as their talents and specialties permit. Social

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[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

scientists and scientists input in numbers one and two above are merely presented as examples into curriculum development and planning.

Tyler[11] presents two screens which might provide filters for ultimate selections of goals for learners to attain. One screen is the philosophy of life adherred to by involved correspondence faculty members. Certainly trivia and the irrelevant need to be weeded out of ultimate useable objectives for enrollees to attain. With the explosion of knowledge factors in the curriculum of life, each faculty member needs to determine and implement that which is vital to learn.

A second screen to cull objectives is the psychology of learning. Indeed, objectives stressed for learners to achieve should be attainable. If learnings are too elementary, learners generally do not feel challenge in achieving. Toward the other end of the continuum, if learnings are too complex, frustration and a dislike for learning may be an end result.

Evaluation of Achievement

Correspondence work completed by each enrollee must be comprehensively evaluated. The evaluator has many specifics to appraise in products returned by students to the appropriate involved correspondence faculty members. What, specifically, might be evaluated within the framework of learners' products?

First of all, the evaluator needs to appraise if a learner responded adequately to each question/item in order to achieve desired ends in the correspondence course. For each correspondence lesson returned to a faculty member to evaluate, depth learning and comprehensive coverage of subject matter need to be in evidence as responses obtained from each enrollee.

Secondly, selected mechanics in writing may be appraised. Thus, correct

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[11] Ibid.

spelling of words, neatness in responses made, legible handwriting, agreement of subject and predicate, capitalization, and punctuation of the enrollee's products might be evaluated by the involved correspondence faculty member. Ideas in returned products, however, from the enrollee are paramount to assess.

Thirdly, each enrollee should receive feedback on a continuous basis from the involved correspondence faculty member to notice progress and achievement. Each enrollee needs feedback to ascertain how well the personal self is achieving in correspondence work. Definite criteria developed by faculty members need implementation in evaluating enrollees' products in correspondence work. These criteria (standards) may well include:

1. Objectivity and fairness.
2. Consideration of alternative correct responses given by students in each lesson.
3. Being conscientious in evaluating and returning correspondence products to the enrollee promptly.
4. Clarity in feedback to enrollees to notice progress and achievement.